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ABSTRACT

This document presents an action plan developed by the Minnesota Early Care and Education Finance Commission during two years of study and deliberation to finance a state early care and education system that supports families and is focused on school readiness. Recommendations are presented in three categories: (1) more time and tools for better parenting; (2) higher quality, more affordable child care; and (3) improvement of the early care and education system's ability to prepare children for kindergarten. In each category are proposed increases in new annual funding proposals for a total of $480.7 million. Recommended expenditures include funding for parent education, refundable tax credits for families with children under 5 years, voluntary parental leave programs, child care assistance, development of a child care quality indicators rating system to assist parents in making choices, child caregiver training and retraining, loans to improve and expand quality spaces for early childhood programs, increasing the quality of early childhood programs to a school readiness level, and increase Head Start funding. Part 1 of the report presents the Commission's goals and values for Minnesota's children. Part 2 discusses the importance of early care and education. Part 3 acknowledges the new economic, cultural, and social contexts which shape young children's lives. Part 4 presents a parent-driven strategy to enhance quality through employer and state efforts. Part 5 details strategies to work toward an effective state-wide early childhood care and education system. Part 6 offers strategies for building public support for the plan. A summary list of the 25 recommendations and a list of the Commission members complete the report. (KB)

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The Action Plan for Early Care and Education in Minnesota

Early Care and Education Finance Commission Final Report November, 2000

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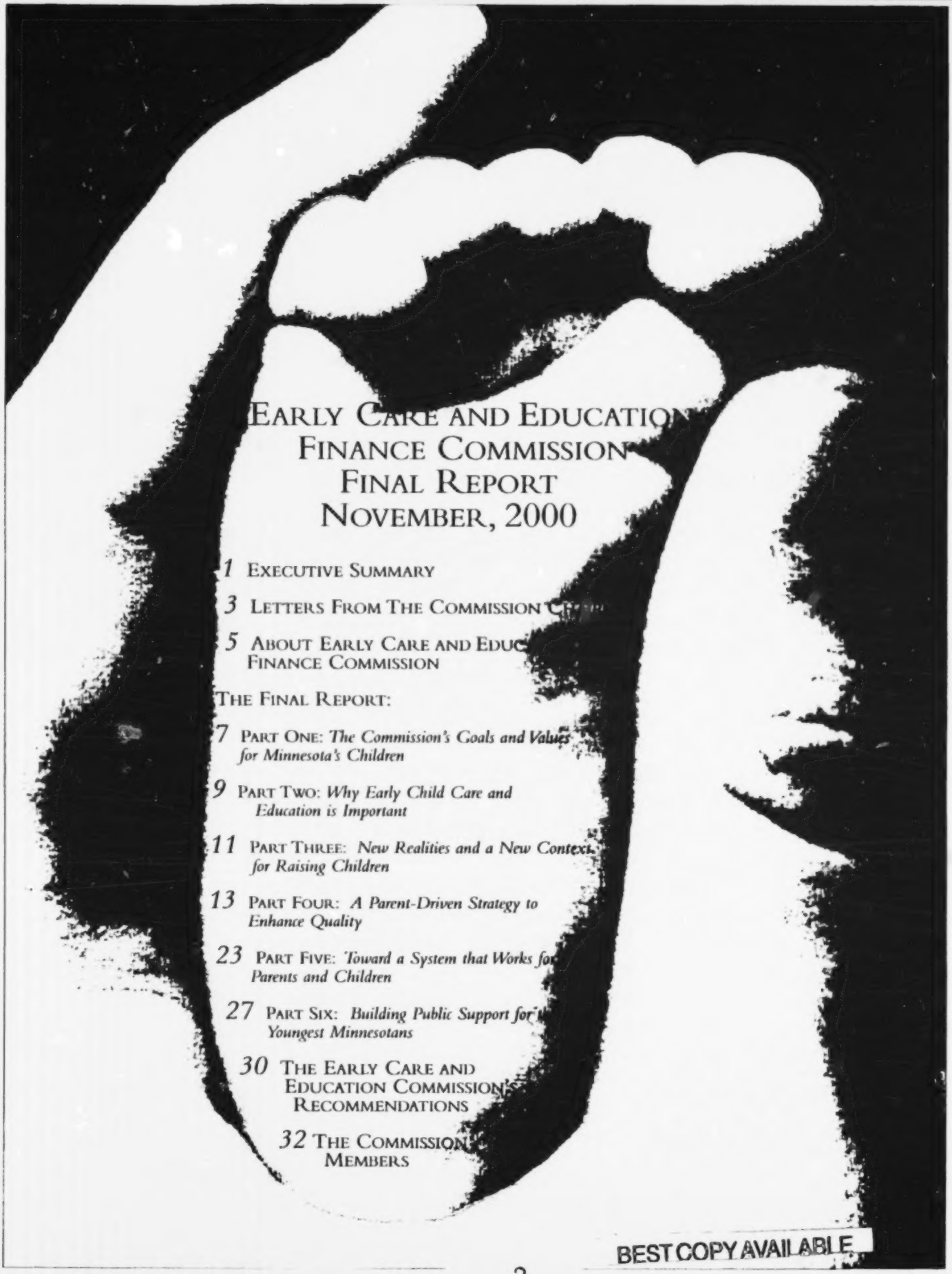

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Executive Summary

The Minnesota Early Care & Education Finance Commission is a nonpartisan commission dedicated to improving the lives of children in Minnesota and giving them the best chance at success in school. It has developed strategies related to financing early care and education programs and services in Minnesota, to achieve that goal.

The Commission based its recommendations on these beliefs:

- There is a need to forge a plan that will work best for children and help build strong families;
- Children are better off staying in one place rather than shuttling from one child care or preschool program to another;
- Resources and time from the private and public sectors, along with the family, need to be focused on meeting the needs of our youngest children;
- We need to move away from the separate concepts of childcare and pre-school to a vision of an integrated system that provides age-appropriate programs for all children;
- The first three years are critical, and resources should not just be focused on four and five year olds,
- We should maintain the child care system within the benefits of the free market, but add several functions that will enable the market to work better for parents.

After two years of study and deliberation, the Commission came up with a set of 25 recommendations for a structure of early care and education that supports families and is focused on ensuring that all children are prepared to succeed when they enter kindergarten. The recommendations fall into three essential categories: more time and tools for better parenting; higher quality, more affordable child care; enhancing the early care and education system's ability to prepare children for kindergarten.

The recommendations, in the report, include the following increases in new annual funding proposals:

Give More Power and Resources to Parents to Raise Their Children:

- $35 million for parent education through Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE).
- $160 million in refundable tax credits for families with children under 5.
- $21.2 million for two strategies for voluntary parental leave programs.

Increase the Quality of Early Care and Education

- $9 million for information, referral, and technical assistance for families using child care.
- $2 million for the development of a quality indicators rating system for child care programs to assist parents in making choices.
- $40 million to train and retain the child care workforce stemming the 40% turnover rate.
- $5 million for loans to improve and expand quality spaces for early childhood programs.
- $35.5 million dollars to consolidate child care assistance for low and moderate income families.

Re-tool and Integrate Early Care and Education to Enable Minnesota's Children to be Kindergarten-Ready.

- $78 million to increase the quality of early childhood programs to a "school readiness" level and expand existing School Readiness programs.
- $45 million dollars to give low income pre-school children access to Head Start.
- $50 million dollars to give low income infants and toddlers access to Head Start.

$480.7 Million Total

For such a substantial upgrade in the way Minnesota cares for young children, there is a price tag: $480.7 million per year. This brings the portion of the state budget allocated to the needs of our more than 300,000 young children to 5 percent for children under five, up from the current allocation of 1.9 percent.

This report is both bold and significant. It is bold because it offers a concrete plan to serve Minnesota's children. It is significant because it brings liberals and conservatives together and because it emphasizes the role of parents in assuring the success of their children.

Implementation of these recommendations will take time. In fact, rather than a one- or two-year plan typical of many such efforts in the past, the Commission ratified a five-year action plan for coalition building, grassroots organizing and "social marketing" to create lasting change in Minnesota's early care and education system.

Although the work of the Commission is completed with this report, a core group of Commission members will lead the implementation, supported by grassroots organizing throughout the state. A "Ready 4 K Minnesota" web site and newsletter will be developed in the coming year. Until then, members of the Commission welcome your feedback and participation.

Letter From The Commission Chairs

Policy-makers, parents, child care professionals, teachers, business and community leaders, health care providers and members of the media:

The time has come to change the way we treat our youngest children, starting here in Minnesota, and each of us has an important role to play. Schools are struggling to provide a quality education to children who aren't ready to learn. Families are struggling for stability amidst the anti-family forces of a materialistic society, not the least of which is a barrage of media images that aren't good for children.

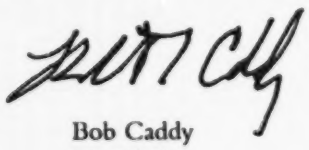
For decades, support has been building for evidence that children need nurturing from parents and other caring adults in order to succeed later in life. Reports by RAND, CIERA, CIVITAS; Fight Crime: Invest In Kids, Civitan International Research Center, and the National Academy of Sciences, issued between early 1998 and September 2000, leave no room for doubt that a universal effort to better care for children under five is not optional. It is critical to families and to the quality of life in our state.

The release of the Early Care & Education Finance Commission report and recommendations is a historic occasion. Never before have both liberals and conservatives agreed upon a whole set of specific strategies for reinventing the early care and education system. Never before has such a task force been assembled in Minnesota, or as far as we know, in the nation. Never before has our State Legislature been challenged with such bold and important directives toward policy to support young children and their families.

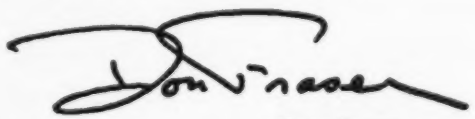
The time is now to play your role in creating a system that will nurture our children, build strong families, reduce the ill effects of ignoring the needs of young children, such as juvenile crime, unplanned pregnancies and astronomical costs for remedial education. Using this report and recommendations as your guide, take a hard look at what you can do to ensure that our young children are prepared for kindergarten, starting at birth. Lead discussions and take action in your workplace, your community, your place of worship, and your home. Start making our young children a priority.

Our thanks to the 42 members of the Early Care & Education Finance Commission and to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, ECFE, as well as leaders of Head Start ECFE, and United Way organizations for your contributions to the work of the Commission and for your ongoing support. Over the next five years we must work diligently to ensure that the more than 60,000 children born each year in Minnesota will get a better start. This report is the beginning of that process, not the end.

There is no reason why all children shouldn't be ready to succeed when they reach kindergarten. As Minnesotans, as conservatives and liberals, and as people who care deeply about young children, we are taking the lead. Let the change begin!



Bob Caddy
Co-Chair



Don Fraser
Co-Chair

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About the Early Care and Education Finance Commission

Co-founded by three organizations focused on early childhood policy in the child care field and created in 1998, The Early Care and Education Finance Commission formulated its guiding principles with an unswerving focus on Minnesota's youngest children. Its goal: "To ensure that Minnesota's children receive early care and education that provides a safe, nurturing, educational and culturally affirming environment." The touchstone of the Commission's work is that every child, regardless of their family situation is given early care and education experiences that assures they are ready for kindergarten and prepared to flourish, not flounder, in their first experience with the K-12 system.

The Commission first met in August, 1998, led by Margaret Boyer of the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, Nancy Johnson, then of Child Care WORKS, and currently with the Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and David Allen, then of Kids Plan. Commission membership grew to include providers and advocates of early care and education, legislators, well known social conservatives and progressives, as well as business and community leaders. Diverse issues surrounding child care include all early care and education, funding of Head Start and Early Childhood Family Education, School Readiness Programs, parental leave and any policies related to funding "the system." Four committees formulated recommendations on:

- Quality Spaces for Children Committee co-chaired by Jim Nicholie and Jacqueline Cross.
- Investment Committee chaired by Jim Koppel.
- Quality Assurance and Systems Integration Committee co-chaired by Dr. Martha Farrell Erickson and Patricia Ray.
- Public Relations or "Campaign for Early Success" Committee co-chaired by Dr. Blanton Bessinger and Steve Young.

The first three committees generated ideas that community and political leaders can implement. The public relations committee generate initiatives to organize strong community support and build public will on issues of early care and education in Minnesota. All committees benefited from non-Commission experts or leaders in crafting their proposals. Each member feels comfortable enough to "live" with the results even though he or she may not have been in complete alignment with the conclusions.

Privately funded by the Bush Foundation, the Minneapolis Foundation, the Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Otto Bremer Foundation, and the Elmer L. & Eleanor J. Andersen Family Foundation, the Commission viewed its work as the beginning of a sustained effort to reorder Minnesota's priorities. It believes there is no better investment of time, energy, or money than those we make on our state's youngest children.

The Early Care and Education Finance Commission Report

Early Care and Education Finance Commission's Goal:

To ensure that Minnesota's children receive early care and education that provides a safe, nurturing, educational and culturally affirming environment in order to ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Part One: *The Commission's Goals and Values for Minnesota's Children*

The Early Care and Education (ECE) Finance Commission believes all children in Minnesota must be ready to succeed in school when they arrive at kindergarten. Every child needs to flourish and grow to his or her maximum potential. For that to occur, however, reforms are urgently needed in the ECE system. In order for all children to succeed, they need:

- Love; stimulation; good nutrition and health; appropriate supervision and guidance; a stable, secure and safe environment; cultural and family respect
- Adults (primarily parents) who hold their well being as a primary goal, including extended family and community
- Attachments with their primary caregivers in their first year
- Openness to the richness of the human family

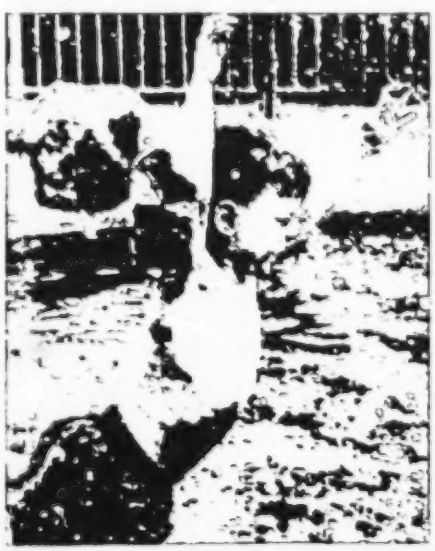
These goals are not controversial, yet their realization is far from universal. Children in their early years face many barriers in getting their needs met. Minnesotans need to identify those barriers and forge a common strategy to overcome them.

Significant improvement in this area will require reaffirmation of our commitment to young children's physical, emotional, intellectual and moral development. Parental power and responsibility must also be reaffirmed to enable that development. Success will depend on the reaffirming of our values, and the primacy of parents.

This report seeks to enable our citizens and leaders to move beyond general agreement with the importance of giving more support to young children. We must provide a basis for serious social and political change. Our private and public initiatives need to match our values.

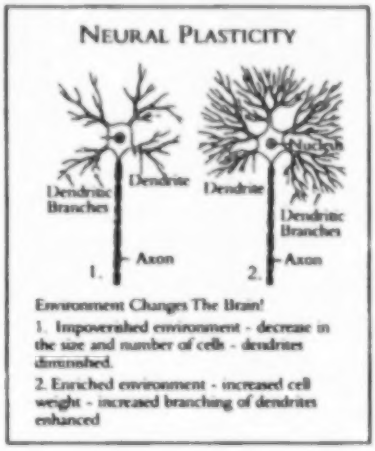
The Early Care and Education Finance Commission places a paramount value on parents exercising their full responsibilities to raise their children well. The Commission also believes it is incumbent upon us as a society to provide parents with the choices and tools to successfully raise their children. As such, the Commission adheres to the following principles:

- Because Minnesota's greatest potential resource is our littlest children, it makes a difference for society how children are raised. They need love, care, guidance and opportunities for learning.
- Parents have primary responsibility for raising their children. Choices for children's care and education are the responsibility of parents. Society has a responsibility to help support families in their role.
- Minnesota's resources and policies must ensure that parents have high quality options in order to make effective choices; that they have early access to information and referral, including a range of support and programming that recognizes the diversity of families, their worldview and needs, and their ability to respond.



PART TWO: *Why Early Care and Education is Important*

We know that the moral, social, physical and intellectual capacities for later success are established in a child's first few years of life, along with family, experiences, and a child's environment. The science of brain research emphasizes the powerful relationship between experience and brain development, most critically in the early years. Early childhood experiences keenly influence how a child adapts to his or her world. Science has also shown that even during gestation, the brain of a fetus continually responds to its environment. It is outside the scope of this report to assess the specifics of healthy brain stimulation and development. We must acknowledge, however, that unhealthy brain and child development creates personal and social albatrosses that severely hurt individuals, and weakens society.

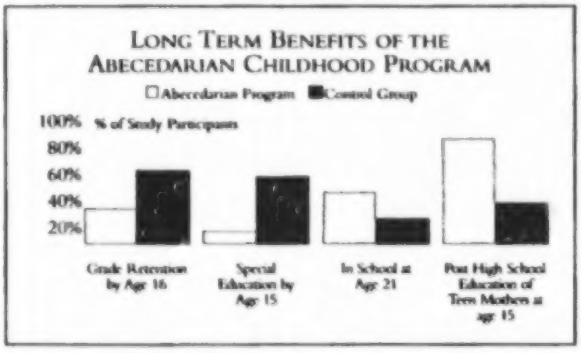

NEURAL PLASTICITY
Nucleus
Dendrite
Dendritic Branches
Axon
1.
2.
Environment Changes The Brain!
1. Impoverished environment - decrease in the size and number of cells - dendrites diminished.
2. Enriched environment - increased cell weight - increased branching of dendrites enhanced

According to the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine in their joint publication, "From Neurons to Neighborhoods," two of the three general areas examined bear on how early development relates to social behavior, a primary concern of kindergarten teachers throughout the United States. They are:

- Acquiring self-regulation
- Communicating and learning
- Making friends and getting along with peers

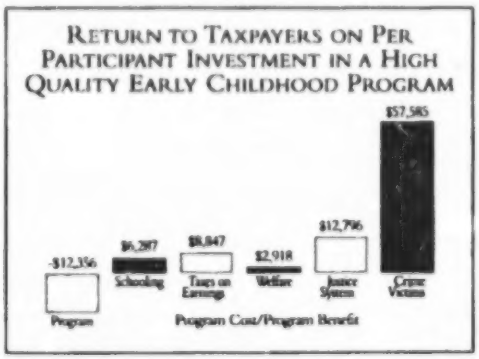
Parents and caregivers that provide experiences to build upon a child's basic capacities, dramatically enhance the health and happiness of their children.

The Proven Value of Doing It Right



Numerous studies have confirmed the lasting value of high-quality ECE. One study known as "The Abecedarian Project," undertaken by the Universities of North Carolina and Alabama, compared low-income, young children who were provided a program of sustained, excellent ECE with a control group of children without the same excellent ECE. The results found that, at age twenty-one, the children in the carefully designed preschool program were more likely to attend college, hold jobs and delay parenthood than were their peers who did not participate in the program.

Another a longitudinal study, "The Perry Pre-school Study" of children from Ypsilanti, Michigan demonstrated that when key elements of a quality program are present, children who participated were more likely to finish high school, obtain good jobs, avoid unwanted pregnancies and not commit crime. This study asserted that for every $1.00 invested in children's early programs and development, savings of $7.16 is related to reduced crime and greater economic productivity. A recent collaborative two-part study conducted by the University of Colorado, UCLA, the University of North Carolina and Yale University also revealed that high-quality childcare experiences led to better performance by the end of the second grade. Further, at-risk children are more affected by the quality of their ECE experience – or lack thereof – than other children. Thus, it is smart money to invest in our children, early on.



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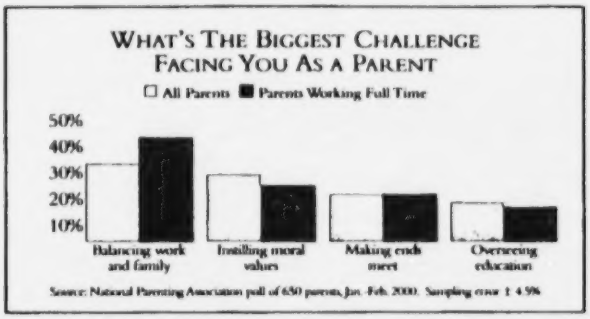
PART THREE: *New Realities and a New Context for Raising Children*

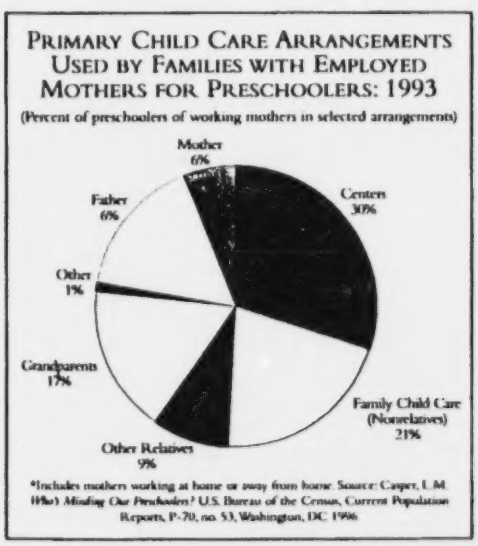
Before crafting a new strategy for meeting the needs of young children, we must acknowledge and understand the context in which parents operate. This context can be divided into economic, cultural, and social components. All three are powerful forces in shaping the daily lives of our citizens, including young children.



The New Economic Reality: Unlike a generation ago, more mothers of young children work outside the home today, creating a new reality of family life. Parents now share the raising of their child with other people in settings outside the child's home. The nurturing and attachment that once had been largely the province of the mother is now undertaken outside the family. Financial needs and forces have eroded the primacy of parents.

The New Cultural Reality: In some unsettling ways, television and film have taken over the role of parenting by showing what its producers and directors believe are acceptable behaviors. Parents must now compete with a media culture that promotes violence, sexual promiscuity, moral nihilism, and the objectifying of human beings. Hollywood, through its various media, exerts a remarkably powerful influence on our citizens. Many messages that it conveys cry out for strong parents to contradict those messages, or protect our youngest children from them. As a result, many old-fashioned virtues seem to have given way to the immediate need for consumption, exhibition, and domination.

The New Social Reality: For purposes of raising young children, the most important new social realities are the general demise of the extended family. Absent fathers are also at crisis levels. America's famed mobility has led to the former, and the breakdown of personal responsibility to the latter. Both injure the chances of young children to acquire the sustained nurturing and support they need in order to thrive. The context in which families find themselves demands concerted actions to counter negative factors in their lives. Both the marketplace and the media must be encouraged to find ways to enable a healthier environment for families and children. The kind of leadership that will affect change is more likely to be moral persuasion than mandates, but it must happen now, and on a sustained basis.


PRIMARY CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS USED BY FAMILIES WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS FOR PRESCHOOLERS: 1993
(Percent of preschoolers of working mothers in selected arrangements)
Mother 6%
Center 30%
Father 6%
Other 1%
Grandparents 17%
Family Child Care (Nonrelatives) 21%
Other Relatives 9%
*Includes mothers working at home or away from home. Source: Casper, L.M. Who's Minding Our Preschoolers? U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P-70, no. 53, Washington, DC 1996

A New Covenant between Parents and Minnesota: Without question, the importance of the parent-child relationship must be reasserted as a fundamental moral value of our state. The pressures and pace of modern living have taken a toll on our age-old concepts of family life. Raising well-adjusted children today while both parents work outside the home brings much stress and strain for all involved. The number of single heads of households has increased, compounding the struggle to raise a child alone. We as a state must do all we can, whether as employers, family members, neighbors, friends, clergy or policymakers, to protect the sacred bond of infants and their parents.

A new covenant between the state of Minnesota and parents requires commitment on both sides. Our public laws and private employer policies must help parents defray the costs of raising young children, and assist parents who wish to stay home with their infants. Parents must seize the opportunity to provide the kind of parenting their children deserve. Given information on good parenting and parental leave strategies, parents will be better prepared to spend the maximum amount of time possible with their children. Government can never be allowed to supplant parents in child raising, but government can help provide resources and information.

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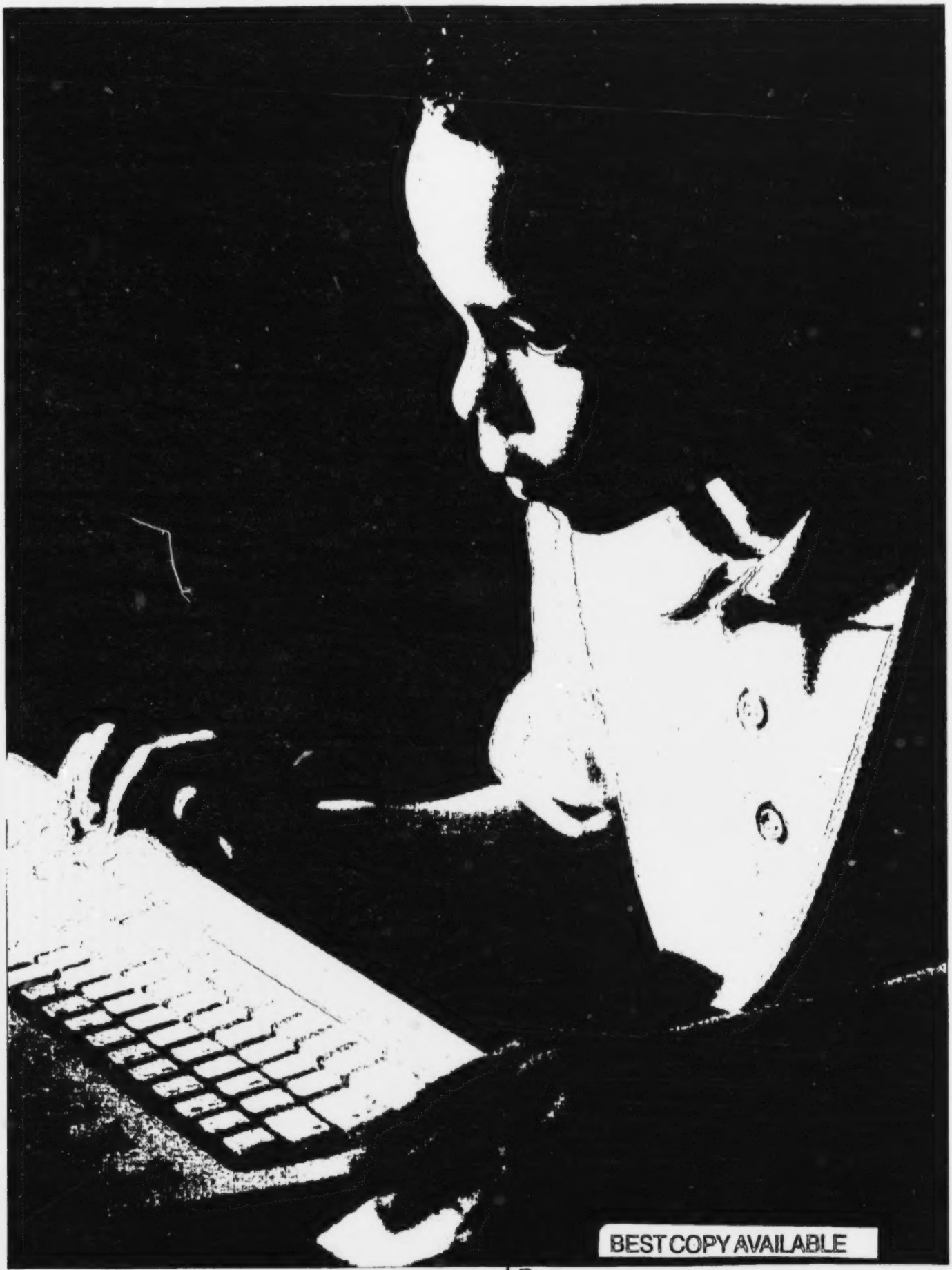

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PART FOUR: *A Parent-Driven Strategy to Enhance Quality*

How Minnesota Can Help Parents

Employers: Minnesota is rich in its history of corporate responsibility, but business alone cannot fill the gap. Formulating parent/child policies that provide maximum possible flexibility and support for new parents is at a critical stage. Employers can engage in a wide variety of activities that support the needs of working parents, such as:

- On-site child care facilities
- Flexible work schedules
- Work-from-home options
- Expanded parental leave policies

General Mills is one of the newest examples of companies with on-site childcare facilities. Another, ECM Publishing Company founded by former Governor Elmer L. Andersen, gives employees up to three years of parental leave at 40 percent pay, to take care of their young children. Other Minnesota companies with exemplary work/life policies include Gold'n Plump, Schwanns, Bongard Cheese and Quality Pork Products.

State Policies: We need to improve our policies in these ways:

1. Educate Our Families: A survey conducted in June and July of 2000, "What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development" sponsored by Zero to Three, Civitas, and Brio Corporation, showed large gaps in knowledge and much misinformation concerning child development and large-scale ignorance on how to support children in their development.

2. Outreach: Increase outreach to special needs groups, including immigrant communities, to assure culturally and linguistically appropriate care for their children.

3. Expand Our Proven Programs: Minnesota has already paved the way for the rest of the United States via its model of parent education, the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program. It is available in every school district and administered through the state's public schools. This successful program provides valuable information to parents, as well as networking and mutual support with other parents. Yet, ECFE is unable to reach approximately 95,000 qualifying parents due to insufficient funding. The solutions are:

- Increase the per capita child formula to $245 for ECFE
- Enlarge ECFE services to include other cost-effective initiatives such as peer mentoring and peer coaching
- Increase outreach to parents using child care centers and Head Start programs
- Expand the capacity of the private Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- Provide parents crucial information about child care
- Provide programs that help working parents stay home during the early months without sinking into poverty
- Provide additional support to recruit and retain infant and toddler caregivers
- Enhance cross-program communication with the public health nursing system, so that considerable efforts in home visiting could occur and parents could learn more about the importance of ECFE, Head Start, and other early childhood programs.

4. More Affordable Child Care: A recent study by the McKnight Foundation determined that access to childcare often presents a serious impediment to keeping people off public assistance. Minnesota currently subsidizes childcare for those on public assistance, for those in transition away from such assistance, and for other low and moderate-income citizens. Because childcare can consume an inordinate amount of some families' income, we need to address this by:

- Improved Tax Policy: In addition to the current exemptions for children in Minnesota's tax code, we need a refundable tax credit in the amount of $ 500 per child for families with children 5 and under. The tax credit will be indexed and will phase out at incomes between $110,000 and $120,000. We must encourage the federal government to increase the dollar level of exemptions for children, as well, since it has failed to keep up with the cost of living over the past three decades.
- Consolidate Childcare Subsidies: If done responsibly along with a sunset for the dependent care credit, Minnesota can save $12 million per year. This will vastly assist low and moderate-income families.
- Enhance the Basic Sliding Fee Program: We need to provide financial support to more low and moderate-income families by increasing the eligibility to 75 percent of state median income. This assures that parents under 75 percent of that level pay no more than 15 percent of their income on child care. Those between 75 and 100 percent pay no more than 20 percent.
- Expand Child Care Resource and Referral. CCR&R,s are the "entry point of information" for child care in local communities. CCR&Rs provide parents with information and counseling about their child care choices, keep up to date information about the supply and demand for care in local communities, recruit providers to meet local demand, provide technical assistance and training to retain providers and improve the quality of care and provide information and technical assistance on child care options to meet employers, needs.

5. Expand Head Start: This national flagship of the ECE program is both a child development program and a poverty program, aimed at both young children and their families. In assessing its costs and benefits, it is also important to remember that this parent-driven program empowers low-income parents.

- Sixteen states, including Minnesota, supplement state dollars with federal funds in order to reach more children. In fiscal year 2000, the federal contribution to Minnesota's Head Start program was $58,803,000; the state added $18,375,000. Costs per child vary around the state among the fewer 30+ programs. The average cost is $5,346 per child. Combined state and federal funds reach less than half of the qualifying children. Moreover, a disproportionate number of those children reside in the metropolitan area.
- Head Start continues to refine its ability to better prepare its children for kindergarten. The Commission believes the rewards of an aggressive prevention strategy outweigh the immediate costs. Thus, in order to serve more families, Head Start funding needs to be enhanced in three ways:
  - Appropriate an additional $45,000,000 per year for those children in the 3 to 5 year old range.
  - Appropriate an additional $50,000,000 to focus on children birth to three, the most important formative years.
  - Encourage and support opportunities and incentives to collaborate with other existing programs in ECE.

6. Encourage Paid Parental Leave for New Parents: Another form of the new covenant, developed by the Children's Defense Fund, is a voluntary parental leave proposal that calls upon employers, employees, and the state of Minnesota in equal measure to fund a parental leave program up to $500 per week for up to 26 weeks. In this proposal, the maximum state and employer contribution is $250 per week. The brilliance of this proposal lies within its voluntary nature as well as equal sacrifice on all sides. It also promotes a strong message to all concerned regarding the benefits to parents to remain home with their new children.

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7. Change the Qualifications for the At Home Infant Care Program: This is an award-winning program. Eligibility needs to be based on the income of the family when one wage earner stays at home, rather than retrospective to the level of two wage earners. It creates another option for low and moderate income families to receive paid parental leave if their employer does not have a paid leave plan.

8. Other Private Initiatives: Faith-based organizations such as Congregations Concerned for Children and the United Way's Success by Six initiative can be further supported to promote improved parent education and support.

The Key Elements to Quality

Parents need to be equipped with basic knowledge on how to assess a potential care provider for their child. Among the wide variety of ECE providers, these elements are needed for infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers to thrive:

- A stable and continuous relationship with a caring adult
- Low ratios between care-givers and young children
- Developmentally appropriate programs
- Well-trained professionals
- A safe environment with adequate food, shelter, and health care
- Developmentally appropriate instruction to promote literacy communication skills, number concepts, problem solving and critical thinking.

Currently, the Department of Children, Families and Learning (DCFL) is undertaking a comprehensive study of the quality of Minnesota's ECE programs. At this time, however, we have no solid base line of data to permit an unequivocal assessment of the state's system. National studies are not encouraging. They indicate that most early care centers are poor or mediocre, and most family-based programs are only adequate, or worse. Moreover, many national studies only assess key elements needed for quality or input measures. Often, they do not look at output measures.

Quality Begins With People

Next to parenting itself, the task of caring for and educating children is the most challenging human endeavor on the planet. Done right, it can create magical growth and transformations in young people and provide them a foundation of unshakeable strength. Done wrong, it can lead to lives of ignorance, self-doubt, and failure. Parents who use child care or early education services have reason to be concerned about the turnover and professional development of people in whom they entrust the care of their children.

Minnesota has far to go to demonstrate impressive support of our childcare providers. Although we profess deep concern about the well-being of young children, the state's treatment of ECE workers suggests otherwise. Perhaps the most dismal fact related to the economic value we place on childcare providers appeared in a Center for Policy Alternatives newsletter. It ranked the states by comparing childcare workers' wages as a percent of the median earnings of all citizens. Sadly, Minnesota ranked 48 out of 50 states.

Wages in Minnesota are so low as to create a large and damaging turnover rate per year for those in the field. Surely those attracted to the ECE professions are not in it as a lucrative endeavor. Unfortunately, this is a quiet crisis, and the victims are our young children. Low wages drive people out of ECE, jeopardizing the crucial relationship between caregiver and child. Shattering these nurturing bonds creates real and measurable damage to a child's development.

A 1998 survey of compensation and turnover rates done by the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals is instructive:

Position	Hourly Wage	Turnover
Director	$12.18	11%
Teacher	$10.04	21%
Assistant Teacher	$7.96	43%
Aide	$6.44	40%

As a result of the skewed economics of the ECE field, the amount of true choice that consumers have is very limited. In terms of the covenant between parents and Minnesota, therefore, it is a hollow admonition simply to ask parents to demand quality and make the financial sacrifice needed to assure it. Indeed, because of the quiet crisis in ECE in Minnesota, now is the time for our citizens, in concert with their government, to commit themselves to building a quality ECE system.

Therefore, Minnesota must infuse the ECE system with the necessary resources, and it can be accomplished in many forms:

- Provide tax breaks and enhanced childcare subsidies. This will help parents as well as providers by enabling more money to flow into the system. Experts in the field assert that when income qualifications for families needing childcare subsidies are depressed, the effect depresses wages throughout the industry.
- Maintain adequate levels of childcare subsidies
- Implement the "TEACH" program

The TEACH program is a scholarship and retention grants strategy developed in North Carolina. The Minnesota model being proposed would allow up to $2000 in tuition assistance for college level courses. Upon completion of a certificate or degree, ECE professionals could qualify for retention incentives. The TEACH model is a partnership between employers, private foundations, public funds, and the individual's contribution. North Carolina, for example, has also increased the effectiveness of their tiered licensing system with its implementation of the TEACH program.

Licensure and Accreditation

Licensure requirements seek to assure a minimum level of health and safety for children in licensed facilities. There is a vast gap, however, between state licensure requirements for ECE versus requirements for an accredited program. Licensure per se is not assurance of a high quality facility or program.

The United States Department of Defense (DOD) examined the issue of certification, as opposed to accreditation. In 1989, the Military Child Care Act enhanced staffing, training, and compensation. Subsequently, DOD engaged RAND to do an analysis on whether additional expenses and efforts toward accreditation expand the benefits of military certification. Researchers found that it did. The United States military now presides over possibly the finest system of ECE in the world.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) requires ECE programs to meet specific standards for accredation that include space, equipment, safety needs, group size and staff-to-child ratios (commonly used in military certification or civilian licensure). NAEYC goes beyond functional requirements and adheres to higher standards of quality interaction with children and continuity of care. Currently in our nation, only six (6) percent of ECE programs are accredited centers. **If the military believes accreditation is worth the additional cost, why should civilian sector children be forced to settle for less?**

We believe Minnesota needs to have a much larger number of ECE programs that meet NAEYC's standards. There are two tools that merit our state's strong support to move our ECE system toward higher quality:

1. A Star Rating system of ECE programs
2. DCFL's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress Resource Guide

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The Star Rating System: Another Way to Empower Parents

Even the most dedicated parent is often hard-pressed to find quality childcare or early education programs. Many parents are forced to settle for mediocrity and some are grateful for any ECE services at all. Currently, the market provides little understandable information to parents on which they can make informed judgments. In addition to developing strategies that support increased quality of services in this market, some kind of rating system is needed to enable parents to be more effective consumers.

It is critically important, then, that a user-friendly means of identifying quality be put in place. For parents to assess the quality of ECE programs, a number of states, including North Carolina and Oklahoma, implement a three or five star rating system. This gives parents information to help them understand which programs are of higher or lower quality. Developing a Star System in Minnesota is a challenge, but some of the pieces are already in place. Clearly, the elements assessed in the NAEYC accreditation process should factor prominently in our star system as well. ECE professionals/providers and parents can best decide the issue of weighing the various factors. Parents participating in focus groups sponsored by the Department of Human Services recommended a tiered rating system program. State policies already reimburse accredited programs and those serving children with special needs at a higher rate. Hence, the concept of identifying and rewarding programs of distinctive quality has already been accepted in Minnesota.

What Parents Must Do to Merit Minnesota's Support

The initiatives discussed above support parents. Parents must do their part and agree to:

- Be present and communicate with their children. There is no substitute for the loving presence of stable, caring parents. Particularly in the earliest years, it is crucial for the child to be held, responded to, talked to, played with, enjoyed, and stimulated.
- Assure immunization and screening. Parents must inform themselves concerning health care screening and immunizations, and make sure their children get them.
- Participate in parent education. Parents need to seek out the resources that will help them learn, understand and meet the developmental needs of their children via private programs or public programs like Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE).

Enforcing these "requirements" is impossible. Nonetheless, some strong commitment from parents must be made. For example, community relations initiatives involving the state, corporate, private and religious organizations, could be developed to honor the covenant between Minnesota and parents.

Another Key Tool for Parents: Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

DCFL has recently published "Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: A Resource Guide," a valuable tool for parents, providers, policy-makers, and the community. In clear language, the document provides information concerning six domains that reflect the full range of child development for four-year-olds and how those developmental building blocks can be enhanced. The domains include:

- Personal and Social Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language Development and Communication
- Creativity and the Arts
- Cognitive Development
- Physical Development

Each domain contains specific "indicators of progress," but they are not a test of ability. The document provides a checklist for parents and ECE providers that assure maximum and balanced support and stimulation for pre-school age children. Every child is different, and the rate of growth in the various domains will not be uniform for all children. However, growth in each "domain" is a conscious goal to help stimulate specific strategies for parents and providers alike. Efforts to disseminate the document statewide can be a part of a public/private campaign to raise awareness of what young children need to succeed when they enter kindergarten.

Quality Spaces

The physical environment for children is of critical importance to their safety, stimulation, and well-being. Delivering quality spaces throughout the state is a daunting challenge because facilities are dispersed and fragmented. Moreover, there are financial and regulatory barriers to meeting the physical space needs of Minnesota's young children. Creating new entities to assure quality spaces is not needed. Minnesota's public institutions such as school systems and parks/recreation systems can and do on occasion provide space for early education programs through bonding or tax revenues. Private non-profit entities such as the Child Care Resource and Referral Network and the Development Corporation for Children can provide information, technical expertise, and means to bring private resources to the table. And employers can help by providing on-site childcare facilities. Finally, Minnesota Early Childhood Facilities grants program provides direct help for facility improvement, often matched with local funds.

Currently, a comprehensive inventory of unmet needs within early childhood facilities does not exist. Though this inventory needs to be undertaken, it is certain that more public and private support is needed to assure our youngest children the best physical spaces in which to thrive. Key ways to promote quality spaces are:

- Encourage local collaboration involving local government and the private sector to generate funds for improved spaces. The Anoka County Head Start program and the Three Rivers Community Action program in Northfield are stellar examples of the power of ingenious local cooperation.
- Encourage private sector leadership to include on-site child care, or the "adoption" by businesses or religious organizations of near-by child care programs.
- Encourage financial support to develop quality spaces. Provide additional funds to the Development Corporation for Children. Encourage banks to lend money to providers of ECE, possibly as part of their Community Reinvestment Act obligations. Also, the state's Early Childhood Facilities grants must be sufficient to keep pace with the demand.
- Seek new revenue sources to assure public support of early childhood facilities, possibly including proceeds from marriage license fees, or funds from the tobacco settlement.
- Change state policies that affect our quality spaces, including tax policies and the Housing Finance Agency.
- Seek a uniform administration of regulations including building codes and promote inter-departmental cooperation, such as the one between CFL & DHS.
- Provide aggressive outreach to current providers to inform them of available resources to upgrade their facilities, possibly as a broader public/private community campaign for ECE.

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PART FIVE: *Toward a System that Works for Parents and Children*

Minnesota lacks a comprehensive system in ECE. In order to help our youngest children attain their full potential, collaboration and communication between providers and programs need vast improvement, including consistent outcome measures with which to assess them. A system must be established that maintains a wide variety of program options, ranging from unlicensed family care to accredited centers.

DCFL is assessing how best to achieve better integration of publicly funded early childhood programs. Members of the early childhood financing committees of the House and Senate, and E-12 Committee in the Senate are concerned about the need for more extensive collaboration among the early childhood programs. The benefits of a reconfigured ECE system will be considerable. They include a clearer delineation of the goals and objectives of parents, providers, and policy-makers, as well as strategies that can be crafted to enhance child development and minimize disruption in children's lives.

The creation of a rational and effective system can be achieved without the massive overhaul of our current options, and by uniting all stakeholders under one common goal:

- Assure that every child is prepared for kindergarten.
- Acknowledge each child's special talents and needs.
- Assure that all schools are ready for those children.

At one level, this is an extraordinarily complex task that must accommodate the vast diversity between the backgrounds and stages of growth of all of our children. The crucial factors for a child's school readiness are as follows:

- Health and physical development.
- Social and emotional development.
- Approaches to learning.
- Language and communication skills.
- Cognition and general knowledge.

Parents, family, and ECE providers have a massive impact on these factors. Social circumstances beyond the ECE system play a major role in shaping school readiness. Focusing on and measuring school readiness is complex. But they provide a powerful unifier to galvanize the public, and re-energize the ECE community.

A Promising Attempt to Assess School Readiness

Improving the transition of young children from ECE to the formal public school system is a two-way street. Schools also need to improve their capacity to be ready for our children. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), a distinguished group of state and federal elected officials, asserted over a decade ago, under the leadership of President George Bush and with the support of the nation's Governors, that:

- By the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn

National studies estimate that more than 40 percent of America's new kindergartners are not fully "ready" for school. Informal estimates in Minnesota are closer to 30 percent. Establishing a baseline of data is as important as gauging the skills of "graduates" from differing pre-school programs. The Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) system has endeavored to do precisely that, to see where improvement can be made. In assessing its overall School Readiness program, the District looked at both the activities of School Readiness families and some of the skills of young children who had gone through various programs. There were dramatic differences between families whose children had been in School Readiness programs compared to those who had not. Those who had gone through the program were nearly three times more likely to:

- Be read to or told stories.
- Color or draw.
- Sing or play music.
- Engage in free play.
- Do math at home.
- Show marked differences in listening skills, extending a simple pattern, and various key pre-literacy skills.

MPS already provides valuable feedback to ECE providers to enable them to improve the school readiness of their little clients. Ideally, this initiative can become a continuous quality-enhancement process. The assessment is done in a way that does not stigmatize or exclude young students, but rather permits more effective identification of areas requiring attention and improvement. MPS' recent assessment of incoming children's school readiness reveals a large number seriously behind in their development which threatens their ability to excel in kindergarten. Disproportionate poverty and diversity may explain part of this reality, but it reinforces the need for a better system of ECE, and one that is tied more closely to the K-12 education system.

KINDERGARTEN READY
5TH YEAR
• Colors • Numbers • ABC's • Cooperation • Catch & Throw
4TH YEAR
• Parts and Whole • Spatial Relationships • Sentences, Plural, Grammar
• Wider Family Relationships • Balance, Coordination, Bowel Control
3RD YEAR
• Experimentation • Pronouns, Plurals, Describe Actions
• Personal Power, Empathy
• Running, Climbing, Carrying, Drawing, etc.
2ND YEAR
• Problem Solving
• Vocabulary • Sense of Self and Others
• Walking, Manipulating Objects
1ST YEAR
• Patterns and Characteristics • Communication & Meaning
• Intimate Relationships, Trust, Sense of Place in the World
• Rapid Brain Development, Basic Body Control
BIRTH
DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT
• Analytic/Mathematical • Language/Symbolic • Social/Emotional • Physical
Development in infants and toddlers is more "wholistic," interconnected, and complicated than for older children. We have more ability to describe and test specific skills, concepts or knowledge in 4 and 5 year old children. These factors mean that the importance and magnitude of school readiness skills for infants and toddlers is often overlooked.
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Linking the Early Childhood System to the K-12 System

A deep underlying flaw in our overall system of education is the lack of a smooth transition. We lack the structure that links pre-school and K-12, and a clear pipeline of communication between those who deal with our youngest children, and those charged with their formal education in public schools. The goal of the National Education Goals Panel, that all children be ready for kindergarten, requires a strategic change in how the early childhood community works with K-12 education in our state.

School Readiness Rejuvenated

"School Readiness" provides effective programming and preparation for school children ages 3 1/2 or older. A 1997-98 evaluation of School Readiness revealed it is particularly important in reaching the "working poor" who do not meet Head Start income guidelines and cannot afford a private nursery school program. Implementation of the legislation at the local level varies widely. The program is under-funded and not universal in practice. Yet, the recent evaluation showed that School Readiness made a measurable and meaningful difference in a child's ability to thrive in kindergarten. We need to move away from the separate concepts of school readiness programs (pre-school) and child care to a vision of an integrated, parent driven system that provides age-appropriate programs for all children. An expanded School Readiness program, therefore, will:

- Build on the structure in place.
- Remain focused on preparing children for school.
- Broaden the ages of eligible young children.
- Assure that funding keeps pace with the expanded number of children in the program.
- Increase outreach to more members of the early childhood community.
- Tie the two worlds of pre-K and K-12 together systematically and universally.
- Provide a mechanism for upgrading quality in ECE.
- Enhance parental choices.
- Create a market-based impetus toward continuous improvement.

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The Structure: The linking entity will be the Community Education program in each school district. Each district will have a new or expanded School Readiness Council made up of ECE professionals and parents, appropriate staff from the K-12 system, and members of the broader community. The Council will report to the school district and to the State of Minnesota.

The Functions of the Council: The Council will be responsible for conducting periodic needs assessment of the ECE community in that district, as well as devise local strategies to improve the quality of preschool services. It will find ways for ECE programs to work together better, and make grant requests to the state Department of Children, Families, and Learning for quality enhancement initiatives. The Council will also create means by which preschool teachers, providers and parents might communicate earlier and better with the teachers who are likely to be teaching their children.

The Role of the School District: The School District has a powerful interest in assuring that every child entering kindergarten is ready for school. The better prepared child requires minimal remedial programs, if any. The District must find means of assessing all entering kindergartners. Likewise, schools must find ways to communicate their hopes and expectations to parents and the ECE community regarding entering students' skills and competencies. Schools must work with providers on common strategies to enable children to meet those expectations. The District must also actively promote and engage in parent involvement programs. The District will serve as the fiscal agent.

The Role of the State of Minnesota: DCFL will administer the quality enhancement grants as well as evaluate proposals from local school districts and the effectiveness of the funded initiatives. It will also continue to oversee the School Readiness program as a whole, and continue to seek better ways of linking pre-K and K-12 regarding school readiness of young children.

Linking Child Care to Learning Readiness: Through formula based distribution of funds, locally administered grants will be available to child care centers and family home providers, in addition to the existing Learning Readiness programs. Funds will be available for quality enhancement and program development in existing child care programs. Grant requests will have to demonstrate how funding will elevate early child development quality, enhance school readiness, and meet local community needs. This process will assist in moving away from the separate concepts of childcare and preschool to a vision of an integrated system that provides age-appropriate programs for all children. This strategy will create School Readiness links to child care quality.

There are important differences between the current School Readiness program and what is proposed here. Our proposal:

- Is universal and targets birth to 5 year olds versus 3-1/2 to 5 year olds.
- Increases the level of funding to serve children with identified needs.
- Builds quality improvement into the system through both a provider and parent focus.
- Links the full K-12 system to the pre-K system for sustained, effective coordination.
- Establishes a universal mechanism, such as the School Readiness Council, to bring together key players in the early childhood community.

Augmentation of School Readiness will not undercut the good work of the current programs but more money is needed to benefit more children and families. Additionally, services need to be located in communities where the children reside, rather than transport them to different programs.

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PART SIX: *Building Public Support for the Youngest Minnesotans*

Minnesota's public and private sectors must help families of young children, and the childcare providers in whom parents entrust their children. Responsible parenting and quality ECE are essential for preparing our children for today's world. The implementation of these recommendations, however, also requires the active support of the public.

Ready 4 K Minnesota: Two Strategies for Enlisting Public Support: The Commission developed a two-pronged strategy to enlist the public in support of these changes. The multi-year campaign is called "Ready 4 K Minnesota."

Strategy One: Organizing the ECE Community. Because the early care and education community is fragmented and decentralized, it will be our challenge to find a coherent and forceful "voice." A unified front of ECE programs is needed to impact policy-makers. As such, the Commission authorized a grassroots organizing plan with the assistance of Grassroots Solutions, a St. Paul-based firm. The "Early Childhood Grassroots Organizing Plan (March 2000)" provides a non-partisan blueprint for uniting the early childhood community in advocacy for young children. The goals of organizing the effort are as follows:

1. Create a sustainable, statewide grassroots infrastructure through which concerned citizens can influence legislative policy on behalf of Minnesota's youngest children.
2. Mobilize the grassroots infrastructure around the broad objective of higher legislative funding targets for our youngest children during the 2001 legislative session.
   The plan's key characteristics are:
   - Permanence; grassroots ownership, not top-down control; child-focused organizing, not turf or power-driven work; focused on specific issues; action-oriented; and inclusive of a wide range of organizations and perspectives. It creates an "Organizing Roadmap" for the first phase of the project.
   - Outlines action steps for coalition building; targeting; coalition assessment and strengthening; building and mobilizing the grassroots infrastructure; generation of materials, information, and endorsements; and evaluation.

The organizing entity is in its infancy and is raising money to enlist the staff to carry out the plan, in concert with the key constituencies supporting it.

Strategy Two: Capturing the Public's Imagination: Abraham Lincoln said: "Public opinion is everything." Any effort to change our state's priorities to benefit our children and families requires strong allies in forging communications strategies. As such, a social marketing campaign will parallel the grassroots organizing campaign to change public opinion. The campaign will build on and complement the efforts by the United Ways of Minnesota, Minnesota Early Childhood Family education programs, Minnesota Head Start organizations, The Children's Defense Fund, the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and Child Care WORKS. Active participants from the corporate community are also being recruited. The campaign will stimulate active participation among parents, teachers, childcare professionals, businesses, health care organizations and faith-based organizations in preparing all Minnesota children age birth to 5 for kindergarten.

Additionally, one of the nation's leading communications firms, Minnesota based Fallon McElligott, is designing this social marketing campaign. It has already made a $1 million in-kind donation. It will seek to galvanize community support for initiatives, that will help our youngest children become ready for kindergarten. Messages will relate to reading readiness, positive adult interaction, health and nutrition and other aspects of quality care. Eight key strategies have been identified to support this communications objective: an "ambassador" to carry the message; enlisting visible advocates; advertising; public relations; targeted marketing to touch points where children spend time; parents and kids clubs; funding and measurement.

Through effective organizing and public communication, "Ready 4 K Minnesota" will measurably move the agenda forward for early care and education over the next five years and beyond. Leadership can hasten and broaden the communication effort immeasurably.

The Need for Leadership

Civic leadership concerning the issues of young children needs consistency. Credible community stalwarts, like the United Way, brings focus to the subject. Success by Six, an important public relations and public information initiative, provides sustained, positive communications on matters related to young children. Similarly, Congregations Concerned for Children and the Minnesota Council of Churches do a great deal to involve the faith community in the struggle to help young children. Some corporate social responsibility programs, such as General Mills and ECM, lead the way in showing how the business community can play a positive role on behalf of young children. There are a myriad of other positive programs and initiatives in the private sector, as well. Unfortunately, the effort is not concerted, and the issues of young children are not preeminent in the private sector.

Civic leadership has also grown out of the work of Peter Benson of the Search Institute. His nationally recognized work focuses on identifying key assets children need to develop to become healthy, productive citizens. His asset-building approach has been adopted in over four hundred cities throughout the United States. It provides practical ideas for how families and communities can help children by focusing on capacity rather than on deficits. In "Starting Out Right" he and his colleagues outline the progression of developmental assets from infancy to adolescence.

In St. Louis Park, for example, Peter Benson's approach has led to the Children First initiative, which has identified numerous ways the community can support children. The proposed School Readiness Councils described earlier will benefit enormously from this very positive model to enlist broad community support.

Political leadership has ebbed and flowed as well. Several years ago the legislature created special committees to focus on ECE funding, signifying greater public commitment. In 1997, the state Senate passed its K-12 financing bill with a provision that required ECE receive the equivalent of 10 per cent of the K-12 level of funding. Sadly, the provision did not survive in conference committee. Currently, the budget for committees that oversee this issue is less than 2 percent of the state budget, which includes several programs not related to ECE.

A key part of the fabric of Minnesota are those who contribute money for the public good. Private sector funders, foundations, corporations, or individuals must come forward to enable the kind of sustained effort needed to accomplish the objectives outlined in this report. The funders must be partners in a war against apathy, ignorance, and political timidity. The funding community was instrumental to the creation of this private Commission. It will be indispensable in the cause of turning ideas into concerted community and political action.

More than 170 new babies will be born in Minnesota today. Of the 300,000 children five or under who are now with us, none can vote, many can not even walk or talk yet. It will be years before they become productive members of our society and economy. Yet, children are our most important treasures. How well we serve them not only directly bears on their lives and their prospects, it reflects on what we truly value as a people.

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Early Care and Education Finance Commission Summary Recommendations

Give More Power and Resources to Parents to Raise their Children	Annual Public Dollars*
• Change At Home Infant Care Program eligibility guidelines to include more families. (Maintain current income levels of BSF, but base eligibility on family income when one parent leaves work to stay at home with their new baby.)	$1.2 Million
• Encourage businesses to support paid parental leave by creating a voluntary leave program. The State of Minnesota will match employers' contribution. One-third income will cap out at $250/week for up to 26 weeks.	$20 Million
• Provide tax credit to employers who continue to pay health insurance for employee on parental leave.	
• Increase the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) formula to $246 per child in order to increase the number of eligible families served from 40% to 80%. Increases in funding include programs such as mentoring, parent education in childcare centers, family home providers and Head Start Programs.	$35 Million
• Encourage hospitals to expand parental birthing classes to include parent support and information. Classes will extend after the baby is born, perhaps partially financed by the insurance industry under their maternity plans.	
• Encourage the Faith community to provide parenting education programs in churches, temples, and other places of worship that will connect parents with other parents.	
• Develop and distribute a "Birth Kit" of information about child development, resources, a video, coupons, small baby toys, etc. A public/private partnership will develop the kit, and MN Extension, ECFE, hospitals and public health departments, etc. will distribute it to new parents.	
• Require parents on government assistance for pre-school and childcare to accept specific responsibilities as parents, such as required immunizations, early childhood screening and evaluation, reading to their children, reading parenting information and be actively involved in their child's programs.	
• Create a $500 per child refundable, indexed state tax credit available for families with children 5 years old and under, using the same income eligibility as the federal tax credit.	$160 Million
• Increase outreach to special needs groups, including immigrant communities, to assure their children receive appropriate care.	

*Amounts refer to new public annual dollars

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Increase the Quality of Early Care and Education	Amount
• Fund a MN "TEACH" model for child development training, loan forgiveness and staff retention.	$40 Million
• Create a star rating system of licensed childcare programs to assist parents in making choices.	$2 Million
• Fund a study of child care quality that DCFL has initiated (Legislature and Governor funded).	
• Explore certification for childcare professionals separate from licensure of facilities.	
• Encourage local collaborations between government and private sector to generate funds for improved spaces for young children.	
• Encourage the private sector to include on-site childcare, or "adopt" nearby businesses or religious organizations to promote childcare options/early care and education by using space within these buildings.	
• Encourage financing of the development of quality spaces by providing additional funds to the Child Development Corporation and urging banks to lend money to ECE providers (Community Reinvestment Act obligations).	$5 Million
• Change state policies that affect our quality spaces, including tax policies and the Housing Finance Agency.	
• Promote a uniform administration of regulations within building codes and inter-departmental cooperation, such as the one between CFL and DHS.	
• Fund and consolidate the Child Care Assistance Program for families making up to 75% of the state median income.	$35.5 Million
• Fund the MN Child Care Resource and Referral Information Network to: • *Provide parents with information about childcare* • *Provide communities with data on local childcare supply and demand* • *Develop new programs to address gaps in marketplace supply* • *Provide technical assistance to employers* • *Coordinate training/technical assistance to providers to improve the competency/retention of their workforce.*	$9 Million

Re-tool and Integrate Early Care and Education to Enable Minnesota's Children to be Kindergarten-Ready	Amount
• Promote integration of all early childhood, before and after school care programming at the local level: • *Embed School Readiness programming and needed services at the child's primary care site* • *Expand local school readiness councils that are responsible for assessing and addressing the needs of children in their community* • *Amend and expand the scope of School Readiness legislation in order to serve children 0-5 years old* • *Use funds to upgrade existing childcare programs and expand School Readiness programs to insure children are ready for school*	$78 Million
• Increase funding for Head Start for 3-5 year-olds, giving priority to programs that have childcare components, a home visitor program, and parent education components.	$45 Million
• Increase funding to Early Head Start (EHS) for 0-3 year-olds, giving priority to EHS's that have childcare components, a home visitor program, parent education components, and those who work with ECFE on infant and toddler parenting education.	$50 Million
• Create individual learning and development plans for each child, based on cooperative efforts of parents and providers. • *Support widespread dissemination of the "Early Indicators of Progress" project for use by parents and providers.*	
GRAND TOTAL OF SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS	$480.7 Million

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The Early Care and Education Finance Commission

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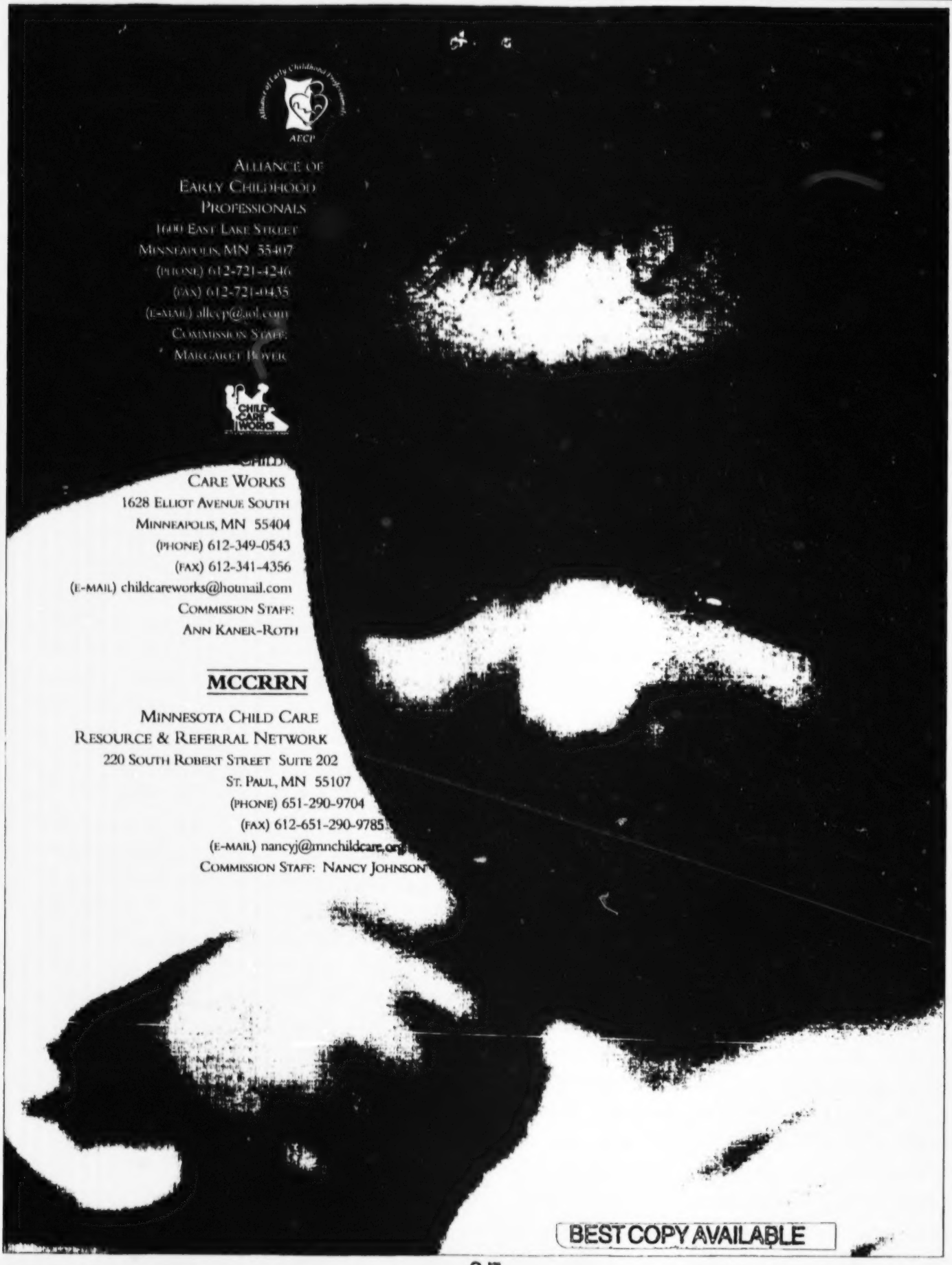

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